

HOMEOWNERS Center

Frequently Asked Questions and Answers



What is the DCRA Homeowners Center?

DCRA's office devoted to helping homeowners get building permits for home improvement projects such as decks, fences, interior renovations and repairs, and window replacement.

What services can I get at the Center?

We'll give you general information about permit regulations and procedures; explain application requirements for your project; help you get a plat; review your plan; and issue your permit when your plan is approved. Our goal is to make your experience as convenient as possible.

Where is the Center and when is it open?

Come to 941 North Capitol St. NE, 2nd Floor. We are open Monday-Friday, 8:30 am - 4:30 pm. Or call (202) 442-4400 and ask for the Homeowners Center.

Who can get a building permit in the Homeowners Center?

Any owner of a single family dwelling or two-family flat, who uses the home as their primary residence.

Why get a building permit?

Your building permit helps you and DCRA make sure that your home improvement project is done safely and properly. A plans reviewer and a field inspector will carefully review your plans and work descriptions for compliance with DC Government codes and regulations. Getting a permit will also reduce the risk of homeowner's insurance liability and fines for illegal construction.

What kind of permits could I need?

Most home improvement projects require one or more of these permits:

- Building Permits
- Plumbing Permits (Supplemental)
- Electrical Permits (Supplemental)
- Mechanical Permits (Supplemental)

All structural and some nonstructural work requires building permits. The Homeowners Center only issues building permits. If your project involves plumbing, wiring, or air conditioning, you will need supplemental permits. Your licensed contractor must get the supplemental permits in DCRA's Permit Center.

Do I need an appointment to visit the Center, or can I walk in?

We encourage you to call (202) 442.4400 to make an appointment to:

- Get general information;
- Hold a pre-submittal meeting to learn about permit requirements for your specific project; and
- Hold a plan review meeting when you are ready to have your project plan approved.

If you walk in without an appointment, we will serve you as soon as time is available in the day's schedule.

As a homeowner, can I get plumbing, electrical, or mechanical permits?

No. Plumbing, mechanical, and most electrical permits are issued only to licensed and bonded plumbers, gas fitters, master mechanics, and master electricians. These permits are supplemental permits: only the licensed professional for each area can apply for them.

Note: A homeowner can get an electrical permit for a limited scope of work. Ask the Center staff for details.

Can I send a contractor to the Homeowners Center?

No. Your contractor can come with you, but the Center only serves homeowners. Contractors and expeditors will continue to use DCRA's Permit Center.

Can I get my plans reviewed without having a pre-submittal meeting first?

This is possible. If you are already familiar with DC permit requirements and believe you have prepared for the plan review, explain this when you call to schedule. The plan reviewer may want to speak with you by phone to make sure you have taken care of all requirements. Our goal is to make sure your plan review is successful the first time!

I've heard about the Permit Wizard. What is it and how can I use it?

The Permit Wizard is DCRA's special computer program that asks you questions about your project and prints out permit instructions tailored to your answers. You can use the Wizard at kiosks just outside the Center.

What are DC's construction codes?

DCRA operates under the 2000 International Building Code, 2000 International Mechanical Code, 2000 International Plumbing Code, 2000 International Fuel Gas Code, 2000 International Energy Conservation Code, 2000 ICC Electrical Code, and Title 12 of the DC Municipal Regulations (DCMR).

What do I need to bring with my building permit application?

Bring four (4) sets of plans. Make sure the plans address all work on the application, including:

- Existing and proposed architectural plans for all floors
- Structural details
- Plumbing details
- Electrical details, and
- Mechanical details

If the building is new or you are building an exterior addition to the existing building, you must bring a DC Surveyor's plat showing the footprint of the proposed new building or addition, with all dimensions.

All plans must be drawn:

- To scale, no smaller than 1/8 inch equal to 1 foot
- On paper no smaller than 11 by 17 inches
- In ink

How long is the permit valid?

Any permit issued becomes invalid if the authorized work does not start within one year after the permit is issued.

Where can I find setback, rear yard, side yard, lot coverage, and parking requirements for my property?

DCMR Chapter 4, Title 11, has the zoning regulations for residential uses. You can download the regulations at www.dcoz.dc.gov or buy them at the Office of Documents and Administrative Issuances (ODAI), 441 4th St NW, Suite 520S, 20001. Call the ODAI at (202) 727-6306.

What should I do if my proposal is not permitted by zoning regulations?

You may appeal any proposed construction that is not permitted under current zoning regulations to the Board of Zoning Adjustment (BZA), at 441 4th St NW, 20001. Call the BZA at (202) 747-6311 to learn more.

Can a contractor who is not registered in DC apply for a permit?

No. DCRA only issues supplemental permits to contractors registered in the District.

The Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs protects the health, safety, economic interests, and quality of life of residents, businesses, and visitors in the District of Columbia by issuing licenses and permits, conducting inspections, enforcing building, housing, and safety codes, regulating land use and development, and providing consumer education and advocacy services.

